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From: Trager

To: Mr. Bertrand

Subject: Board system of Russian transliteration.

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The system of transliteration of Russian used by the Board is based on the principle that the best transliteration system is one in which each letter of the original alphabet is replaced by a single letter, or by a combination of letters, in the Latin alphabet in such a way that it is always possible to identify the original by looking at the transliteration. There is then the further principle that the letters selected as the transliteration symbols should be pronounceable more or less in keeping with the normal reading habits of English-speaking people (with a minimum of special instructions needed) and, further, that no diacritical marks or a minimum of such marks should be used.

In keeping with these principles, the PCGN 1942 system of transliteration for Russian was adopted, the only departures from it being made in order to clarify certain difficult points and eliminate the possibilities of confusion.

Most of the letters of the Russian alphabet are always transliterated into Latin letters in the same way. In Russian alphabetical order, the letters about which there is never any difference of opinion as far as English-speaking transliterators are concerned, are the following: a, b, v, g, d, zh, z, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u, f, ts, ch, sh, shch, yu, ya. For the remaining letters the following comments are in order. The letter that follows d is sometimes transliterated as e, sometimes as ye, and occasionally in other ways. In our system it is transliterated as e, except that at the beginning of a word and after any vowel letter (a, e, i, o, u, y) and after the "hard sign" and the "soft sign" it is to be transliterated by the two-letter combination ye. Similarly, when this letter appears in Russian with two dots over it (these two dots indicating the pronunciation approximately shown by yo, the o being pronounced like aw in law) the transliteration is e with two dots over it, and ye with two dots over it, the y being used in the same positions that have been indicated for the Russian letter without the two dots. In the PCGN system the sequence of letters d plus zh is supposed to be transliterated by dzh when the two letters belong to separate syllables and by j when they belong to the same syllable. Such a prescription involves a knowledge on the part of the transliterator of a great deal of grammatical and other information about the Russian language and it makes impossible mechanical transliteration. Furthermore, in Russian the sequence of letters d plus zh is simply a sequence of two letters, just as d plus kh or d plus a, or any other sequence of two letters. That is, in the Russian system of spelling, this particular combination of letters has no special significance about it different from the values of the separate letters themselves. There is, therefore, no justifiable reason for transliterating the

JCS review completed

two letters sometimes one way and sometimes another, and the BGN system chooses the purely mechanical way of transliteration. The letter called in Russian "short i" is in some systems transliterated by i. This letter appears with very few exceptions only after a vowel. Since the Russian letter i also appears after a vowel, the practice of not distinguishing "short i" from i in the transliteration may lead to confusion of names that are different in Russian. For this reason "short i" is transliterated by y in the PCGN system and in our system. The BGN system, however, allows of no exception to this rule, and transliterates "short i" by y in all positions, even after the letter which may be referred to as "hard i" which is also transliterated by the letter y, giving a double y in such an instance. Here again, if the second of two y's is left out, confusion may result between names originally different, since in Russian spelling the "hard i" by itself and the "hard i" followed by "short i" will differ as to pronunciation and in other ways. The letter which the Board and PCGN transliterate kh is sometimes transliterated by a simple h. The use of kh avoids certain difficulties which would otherwise arise. The letter known as the "hard sign" is usually omitted in transliteration, while the PCGN uses an inverted comma. The BGN system uses a double apostrophe or quotation mark because the inverted comma is usually not available on typewriters, and furthermore, is not different enough from the single apostrophe which is used for another letter. The omission of the "hard sign" from transliteration would lead to confusion between names originally different. The letter "hard i" is transliterated by y in nearly all transliteration systems, and we retain this transliteration. The "soft sign" is omitted in some systems of transliteration, but its omission leads to confusion between things that are very different to a Russian. Following PCGN, the BGN uses a single apostrophe for this Russian letter. The Russian letter that may be referred to as "hard e", which has the sound of an English "short e" not preceded by a y sound, is in the BGN and the PCGN systems transliterated by e. In Russian this letter occurs only at the beginning of a word, or after a vowel, so that by the use of ye for the Russian letter e in those positions, any confusion between these two letters is avoided. The few non-Russian names in which the "hard e" occurs within a word are not important enough to justify setting up any special treatment for this letter.

If the question is raised, why is the letter y used so much in this transliteration system, and how can the system be reversible if y is used in so many different ways, the following answer should be made. The letter y, when followed by e, u, or a, is part of the Russian letters which are transliterated by ye (and e) yu, ya. The letter y after a, e, i, o, u, y, and followed by a consonant, or by nothing, transliterates the Russian "short i". The letter y after a consonant, and followed by a consonant or by y or by nothing, transliterates the Russian "hard i." These three uses of the Latin letter y are completely unambiguous, and there is no overlapping between them. The only possible exception to the last statement might be found in some names of non-Russian origin, but the number of these is not great enough to warrant any special treatment.

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Memorandum to JANIS contributors.

In accordance with the verbal agreement reached in the meeting of JANIS contributors on Thursday, November 3, the following table of differences between the PCGN system, 1942, and the BGN system of Russian transliteration is submitted:

<u>PCGN, 1942</u>	<u>Cyrillic</u>	<u>BGN</u>
j, dzh	ДЖ	dzh
‘	Ь	"
y	bl; блЙ	y, yy

As the table shows there are only three differences in the two systems. Practically it is less than that, for the cyrillic letter Ъ is rarely used. In a representative selection of over 2,000 place names we found it used only once.

In both systems Д is transliterated as "d," and Ж as "zh." In combination (ДЖ), however, they are always transliterated as "dzh" by BGN, while if they are a part of the same syllable they are transliterated as "J" by the PCGN system. Although one can be sure that where they are combined at the beginning of a word they are part of the same syllable, only one who knows Russian can be sure of the breakdown in the middle of a word. Therefore, the BGN system is simpler and permits transliteration back to the cyrillic.